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TAGS: [PREL](#) [ETRD](#) [KTFN](#) [IZ](#) [EZ](#)
SUBJECT: STATUS OF CZECH ENGAGEMENT WITH IRAN

REF: A. 07 PRAGUE 1293
[1](#)B. 07 PRAGUE 1156

Classified By: POLEC Counselor Michael Dodman for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Although Czech efforts to upgrade their diplomatic relations with Iran (in advance of the Czech 2009 EU Presidency and on a similar footing with other EU members) met with setbacks last year (ref A and B), the Czech MFA continues to pursue the effort. The GOCR cannot anticipate Tehran's reaction, but repeat they are not prepared to accept any conditions the regime may attach to normalizing relations. The Czechs are considering a possible trip to Iran at the deputy Trade and Industry Minister level, even though relations have cooled since the GOCR public statement on the U.S. National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) highlighted the need to continue applying pressure to Iran on its nuclear military program. A deal for the sale of some civilian aviation equipment is being discussed. End Summary.

Czech Agreement Request of Iran

[1](#)2. (SBU) The Czechs, who believe in the importance of dialogue, have sought to normalize relations with Iran since Iran imposed a quasi-trade embargo and downgraded relations soon after Prague-based Radio Free Europe (RFE) launched its Farsi service in 1997. The Czechs believe dialogue at the Ambassadorial level is especially important given the significant role they will play as EU President beginning January 2009 in any talks or negotiations with the Iranians on behalf of the EU. Their effort to normalize relations this past fall, however, met with a setback with the sudden death of the nominee. According to the MFA Director of Middle East and North Africa Affairs, Josef Rychtar, the Czechs have now selected a new nominee. Rychtar indicated, however, that he is not optimistic that Iran will grant agreement, based on his conversations with Iranian Charge d'Affaires Nili.

Iranian Cold Shoulder Due to NIE

[1](#)3. (C) In response to Polecon Counselor's query about whether the Iranians were applying conditions before offering agreement, Rychtar indicated that while the Iranians have not set conditions, they have repeatedly made clear their displeasure with the Czech statement on the NIE. Interestingly, Rychtar noted that the Iranians are still raising the NIE issue privately and publicly, even going so far as dropping their standard complaints about RFE's Farsi service - something they have raised for years whenever given the opportunity. The GOCR, however, has steadfastly maintained its position on the NIE and in fact, its December statement remains on the MFA public website.

Czechs Consider Travel to Tehran to Discuss Commerce

14. (C) Notwithstanding the signals (nfi) that Rychtar sensed from the Iranian Charge that agreement may not be forthcoming, he said the Iranians have indicated interest in a visit to Iran by the Czech Foreign Minister. (Note: A visit by FM Schwarzenberg, who speaks unabashedly on human rights and does not shy away from criticizing the regime in Iran on several fronts, could turn out to be quite a surprise for the regime.) The MFA has made clear that it will not accept strings attached to its agreement request, and is not ready to begin discussing a ministerial-level visit. Rychtar noted, however, that the Czechs are contemplating a lower-level spring trip by Deputy Ministry of Trade and Industry Milan Hovorka. The Deputy Minister would not speak to political matters, rather he would focus on trade issues, such as in the transportation field. Apparently an (unnamed) Iranian airline is interested in purchasing 10-12 small Czech passenger planes. Rychtar made clear that the planes the Iranians are interested in do not have American components and that the Iranians have indicated that they would be for commercial travel. Rychtar remains skeptical that anything will come of this deal, since the airline apparently operates now with only two plans and he questions the company's capacity to complete such a purchase.

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